

PEACE BOAT MARKS GDAMS AT SEA

79th Global Voyage Participants call for cuts in military spending on Global Day of Action on Military Spending (GDAMS) 2013

It is not widely known that the global spending on military has been rising by 50% over the last ten years and that last year in 2011, global military spending surged to US \$1.74 trillion. 15 April was the Global Day of Action on Military Spending in 2013. This is day on which the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) published the figures on military spending around the world. Since 2011, civil society groups have taken this day as the day of action to call for a shift in the way this money is spent on arms to welfare and development. The call reiterates what the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon said that “War is overfunded and peace is underfunded”. On this day, people on all continents join together in joint actions to focus public, political, and media attention on the costs of military spending and the need for new priorities. Such events help to build an international network around this issue. Peace Boat is one of the partner organisations of the GDAMS and so organised actions in Japan and also onboard the ship during the 79th voyage.



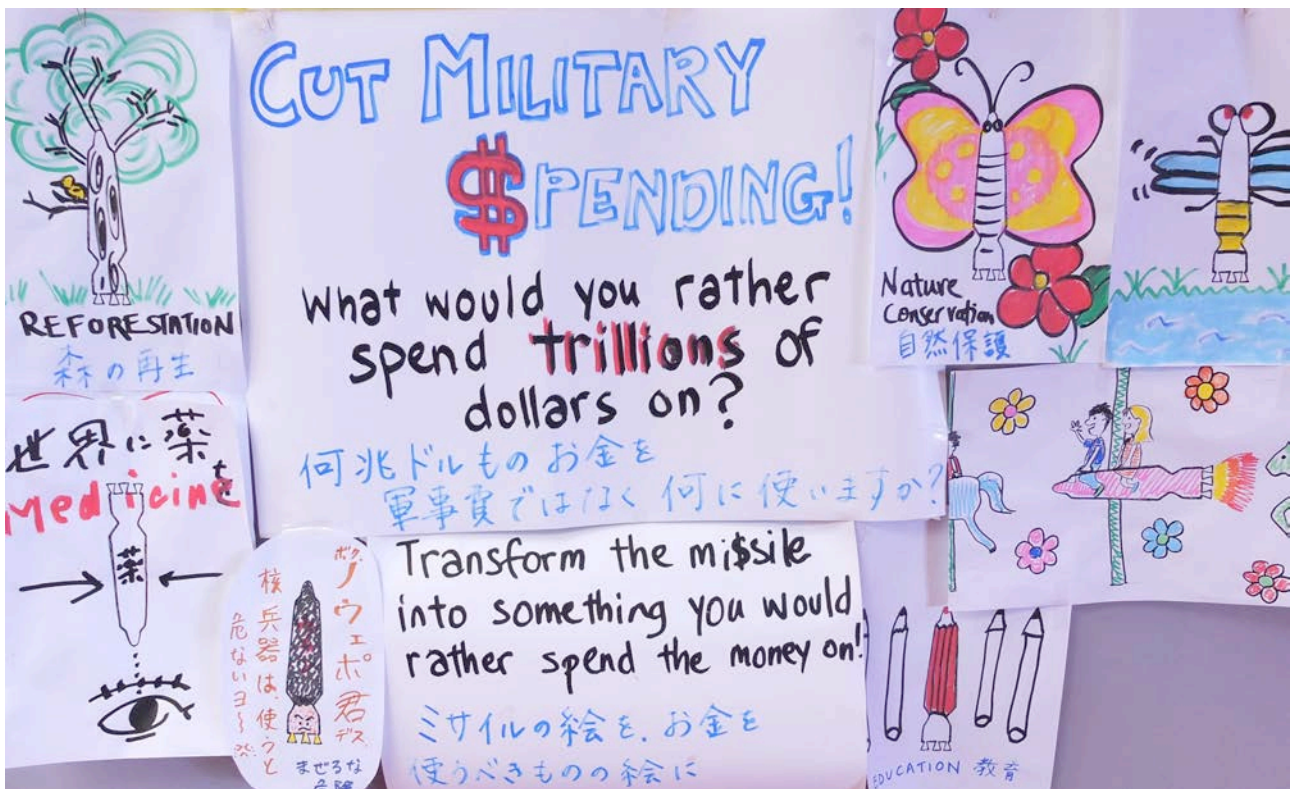
Watanabe Rika gives an introductory lecture about Global Military Spending to Peace Boat participants

Peace Boat staff, Watanabe Rika and Karen Hallows gave a lecture in the morning of Global Action on Military Spending day as the first step was to raise awareness among participants about the day and what it means. Participants said they were shocked to learn about the amount of money that was spent on military now and that this information was not well publicised in the media enough. The lecture introduced the figures published on that day from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute about which countries had increased their spending on military arms. The lecture compared the money spent by different countries and regions as well as looking at how spending had increased in some areas and decreased in others. It also compared the amount of money spent on military compared to social projects such as health care or education. The Day of Action was introduced with photographs from the GDAMS website of actions that been taken around the world in 2012 from India to Norway to Okinawa, Japan.



Peace Boat participants call for a cut in military spending from the Indian Ocean

After learning about the day, participants were invited to show their solidarity with the movement by taking a photograph on top deck. The participants gathered on the deck under the hot midday sun with a banner that said “Cut Military Spending” in English and Japanese. On this day, actions were taken and people held up banners and made speeches all over the world, but perhaps Peace Boat is the only place where people are calling for a cut in military spending from the oceans. Peace Boat participants of all ages participated in the photograph, including the children of the onboard Montessori Education Programme. One of the mothers of the programme, who has two children aged 3 and 1, said that it was important for her children to be in the photograph because this was an issue which affected the next generation as well, “Resources are limited, we need to think about we use those resources whether it is money or our natural resources. We need better resources in our schools, pens, books, educational materials. I want our limited resources to be used to make a better world for my children. I don't want them to grow up in a world full of weapons.”.



Some of the pictures drawn by participants to show what they would rather spend the money on. The original shape of the missile can be seen in the pictures.

Participants were encouraged to creatively think about ways in which that money could be better spent. Participants were given a piece of paper on which was drawn the outline of a bomb. Then they used that outline to make it into something that represented how they would rather the money was spent. One participant drew a butterfly to represent environmental conservation, another a tree to represent reforestation. A desire for increased spending on healthcare was represented by a picture that turned the outline of the bomb into a syringe for vaccinations. Many of the ways in which participants would rather the money was spent were linked to the Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs were featured in a previous lecture and workshop and lecture onboard. While those who attended that event were keen to see the MDGs accomplished, many were wondering where the money might come from. It was clear to see a link between a reduction in the money spent on the military and achieving the eight goals. Disarmament for development is the best way to achieve the millennium development goals.



Participants surprise diners in the restaurant with a flashmob with signs of how they would rather spend the money spent on the military.

One participant, said she wanted this issue to be more widely publicised, that it should be covered in the main stream media 'we had no idea' so they set about spreading the word amongst the onboard community. One group of participants organised a silent flashmob in the dining room during dinner. They sat at different places throughout the restaurant and at exactly the same time, stood up from their seats and held posters above their heads. They had each written "I would rather spend the money on..." and then written their own choice. Several of the posters read 'education' while others were as diverse as 'cycle paths' or 'cancer research'. The posters attracted attention from those who were eating their dinner and provoked discussion later amongst those who had attended the lecture earlier in the day.

Some of the participants were particularly troubled about the Japanese government's decision to increase military spending in light of increased tensions between Japan and China. One participant said that "Increasing military spending was not the answer. This will just make matters worse. Instead we need dialogue like the youth who came onboard this ship, referring to the North East Asia Youth Peace Dialogue Programme that was held onboard with youth from Japan, China, Korea and Hong Kong. We need to make a stand against this!"